



Al-Risala 1990

December

A Ten Year Long Silence

The khilafat movement was launched with great enthusiasm at the beginning of the twentieth century, and saw its end in 1924. For about ten years Indian Muslims were feverishly engaged in it. Perhaps the only prominent personality to criticize and oppose this movement was Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanavi (1863-1943).

Here is an excerpt from the records kept by Maulana Thanavi: "During the period when the Khilafat movement was in its heyday, people everywhere were as if set on fire by the provocative speeches being made. Mischief mongers were rampant. They sent me threatening, abusive letters ordering me either to participate in this movement, or be ready to be shot dead." Later, he goes on to say that during this movement, one of its prominent supporters visited me and asked me why I did not join. I told that the first condition of my participation was that there would have to be just one leader for all of the Muslims. If this condition was not met, the whole movement would be unlawful. He replied that they chose me as their leader. I said that I was ready to become a leader, but on certain conditions."

The gist of his first condition was that all Indian Muslims should make over their wealth and property to him for, without funds, no leader could take action.

The second condition was that all the prominent scholars and leaders should sign an agreement to the effect that they accepted him as their leader. If all of them signed, without any opposition, he would be their leader. But, if even one of them was not in agreement, he would not give his consent, for he felt that, where there are differences of opinion, a leader cannot be a leader. Once he had been accepted unanimously as their leader, he would have it in his power to quell any differences which subsequently arose. But before having been assured of their unanimous support, he would not have the right to take any such action. This would apply to any leader they chose.

After explaining his several conditions, he said, "Now listen, after being chosen as the *amir* (leader), my first injunction to the people would be to stop agitating and to refrain from engaging any khilafat activities for the next ten years. All movements, all hubbub must cease – instantly. During this ten-year period I will endeavour to make them into righteous Muslims by arranging for regular reform work to be carried out. Briefly, after completion of all the necessary reform work, I will issue directives as I deem fit. This is the only practical way to set about it. If you want me to be an *amir* only on paper, the result will be that, today, I will be hailed as a leader and, tomorrow, I will be dubbed the people's worst enemy.

He goes on to say, "In short, this undertaking will be possible only through adherence to certain principles. Without this, it is not possible even to run a home, let alone a whole country. There are certain of my principles for which I am being outrageously abused and about which everyone is angry

with me. The only reason for their anger is that I tell them to follow certain principles in their working. I tell them to think before acting. I tell them not to be carried away by their emotions, for that will produce very bad results. I tell them to remain within the limits of the *Shar'iah*. And they regard these things as obstacles in their path. (*Al-Idhafat al-Yaumiya*, vol. 1. pp. 101-4)

No one paid any heed to these extremely just and reasonable points which he raised, for the Muslims in general were too intent on running after verbose, emotional speakers. Giving a picture of the Muslims of his time, Maulana Thanavi writes: "The state of the Muslim public is such that anyone who issues edicts in their favour, or any religious scholar or leader who follows them will become for them the embodiment of all virtue. But anyone who dares to make any utterance which runs counter to their wishes will reach his nadir; he will be deemed their worst enemy. This policy on the part of the Muslims is wholly against Islam and the *Shari'ah* (p. 111).

This incident should be a lesson to those who say that Muslims do not have the right kind of leader. This is simply not true. The truth is that Muslims, due to their distorted bent of mind, do not adopt the right kind of man as their leader. They run after the false speakers; one who speaks the truth does not interest them. This verse of the Qur'an applies to the Muslims of today: "And if they see the way of right conduct, they will not adopt it as the way, but if they see the way of error, that is the way they will adopt" (7:146).

Why She Chose Islam

Three years ago, Miss Sandra Sterling, (now renamed Alia Sterling) an American living in Washington, decided to enter the fold of Islam. Giving an account of her conversion, she told me that it had all started with her finding some old books in a cupboard in her home. These books had been bought by her mother when she was living in Cairo with her grandmother who was, at that time, an official of the American Embassy there. The significant part is that these books included a copy of an English version of the Qur'an. Miss Sterling began reading it, and, as she read on, she found her interest in Islam beginning to grow. She therefore bought more books in Washington on the history of Islam and the Prophet's biography. After studying these books, she could confidently say that "Islam answered all the questions I had in mind. Islam is based on monotheism, and that is what distinguishes it from all other religions. For instance, Judaism too speaks of one God, but its followers claim that all the blessings of God are reserved by God for one nation, that is, the Jew. I fail to understand how God, who is the Creator of all things, could possibly reserve all His blessings for one particular group."

Then there was Christianity, whose followers claimed that Jesus Christ was the son of God. Again, she failed to understand how a human being could possess the attribute of divinity. After pondering over this for a long time, she finally announced her acceptance of Islam. (*Islamic Voice*, Bangalore, November, 1987.)

A model of the desired religion exists from birth in man's nature. That is why, when he becomes acquainted with the true religion, he immediately accepts it, because it corresponds exactly to the model which already exists in his subconscious mind.

4 December 1990

Framing admonition in general terms

According to 'Aisha, when the Prophet used to hear something displeasing about a person, then he would not take that person's name when administering admonishment. Rather he would say: "What's up with people who do or say such things." Thus he would discourage people in a general way from following suit, without directing criticism at anyone in particular.

Which Religion

One of the books by Dr. Radha Krishnan (1888-1975), one of the most famous writers and philosophers of India, is entitled *Religion and Culture*. This book demonstrates how extremely necessary religion is to mankind. Man cannot live without religion. Dr. Radha Krishnan writes, "There is no question of religion or no religion, but what kind of religion."

The kind of religion advocated by him is one which expounds the oneness of religions. That is, the concept that there is only one universal reality which is found in every religion, the only difference being that of form.

This concept is formed by guessing the whole from a part. It is true that there can be differences of a relative nature, without this detracting from the essential truth of any given religion. But when the differences concern fundamentals, e.g. the existence or nonexistence of God as a permanent central feature, out and out atheism can not be given any credence.

There is one kind of religion which bases its tenets on personal experiences. Such a religion is wholly unacceptable, the real question being one of authenticity. A religion formed on the basis of personal experience cannot be regarded as authentic and, as such, it will remain unacceptable.

Which is the religion to be adopted then? From the purely academic point of view, the answer is a religion which is an established one. That is, a religion firmly established on the basis of historical criteria. A religion whose Prophet is a historical figure, whose holy book is preserved in its original form is one, in short, which meets every such requirement.

5 December 1990

Leaving God to deal with any harm done to one

Imam Zain'ul-'Abidin (38-4AH) was the son of Imam Husain Ibn 'Ali. He was the only member of Husain's family to escape the slaughter of Karbala. Someone once told him of a person who spoke ill of him, and wanted to do him down. Imam Zain'ul-'Abidin asked to be taken to see this person. Meeting him, he first greeted him with "may peace be upon you". Then he said: "If what you say is true, then I pray that God should forgive me. And if it is false, I pray that he should forgive you."

The Approach Muslims must Adopt

The Western media have often been labelled anti-Islamic, but, surprisingly, the one BBC T.V. films, which I saw in London was in fact supportive of the Muslim cause. I chanced upon this telecast in the month of May 1990 during a stopover in London, on my way to the United States of America. It was about *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie. I wish more Muslims could see this revealing episode.

It was a very novel idea indeed. Two groups of people, with diametrically opposed view on *The Satanic Verses* were closetted together under one roof for four days to exchange ideas and explain their respective stands.

One group, which believed in total freedom of speech and saw nothing wrong in the contents of the book, was composed of three Englishmen and a lady. Interestingly, the lady was a Muslim in her forties married to an Englishman. To her, Islam was an intolerant religion and the Muslim bigots. Her colleagues firmly believed that banning any book was an infringement of freedom of speech, and that *The Satanic Verses* should, therefore, never have been banned. One of them was the owner of a book shop which sold the book in dispute. The other group was represented by four young and practising Muslims including a girl, from the Indian subcontinent, but living and perhaps even brought up in England and they came from diverse professional backgrounds like the other participating team. But they had one thing in common, a strong and abiding faith in Islam.

They were housed in a building specially rented for this purpose. For full four days they interacted with each other, held group discussions, indulged in community cooking, informal chats and fishing, etc. The Muslims would disengage from the activities when it was time to pray.

On the first day, both sides were guarded and a little tense, but were more relaxed later when a free exchange of ideas took place. The Muslims explained their point of view with great zeal and sincerity and remained calm and courteous. That is not to say that the others were discourteous.

The final day was full of surprises. The owner of the shop declared, "I have decided not to display *The Satanic Verses* on my shelves! The commentator was quick to ask if he had been intimidated. He said. "No. I don't think I would have yielded to any pressure. I am doing this in deference to Muslim sentiments which I understand better now."

The Muslim lady had a change of heart too. She said, "I had greatly misunderstood Islam. I was apprehensive of the treatment I would get from the participating Muslims, but they accepted me for what I am, and explained to me what Islam is all about. I agree with them that this offending book should not have been written. "The other two participants were deeply touched by the zeal and the sincerity of the faith of the Muslims and were willing to see the whole thing in a different perspective.

It was amazing how a group of young Muslims was able in so short a time to transform the thinking of hardened men and a woman who had been so strong in their own convictions.

Consider their achievement against the dismal result of the large-scale protests over *The Satanic Verses* made periodically by thousands of Muslims in London. Can the thousands of protesters produce just two people whose sympathy they have gained against the book? The fact is, whenever the Muslims take to the streets, it only hurts their cause. They lose the sympathy of the common man, who by and large, is orderly and disciplined, and hates to see his life disrupted by street demonstrations. To my knowledge, all that the Muslims in London have achieved is a hardening of the attitude of the U. K. government and members of the public on this issue, and the label of intolerance, for the Muslims as a community.

This story also signifies the two broad approaches available to the Muslims where they feel they are disadvantaged and need to remedy the situation. If only the Muslims cared to open their eyes, they would know which of the two approaches would bring positive results with honour. (Contributed by Wg, Cdr. Yusuf Khan. New Delhi).

8 December 1990

The Return to Nature

Dr. Joyce Brothers, an American Ph.D in psychology from Columbia University and practising psychiatrist, has recently published a book called *The Successful Women*.

One of her articles, which appeared in the *Readers' Digest* monthly (April, 1990) mentions, many couples who came to consult her about the state of their married life. She has summed up her experience of her meetings with these couples in these words:

Many of the questions couples ask me have changed in recent years. A decade ago, the first reaction when a marriage hit rough times was, "I want a divorce." But today the men and women I talk to are more likely to want permanent relationships.

Freedom had come to be considered the *summum bonum* in the western world. In fact, total freedom had come to be regarded as a matter of human birthright. But experience has shown that this ultimately leads to general permissiveness, and no good society can ever be based on the concept of total freedom for purely selfish enjoyment.

Better experience has caused the theory of limited freedom to be adopted now instead of complete freedom. Complete freedom had led to broken homes and feeling of instability in life. Now man has been compelled to modify his modern beliefs, i.e. he has now to realize that in order to have family security and a peaceful, ordered life, he must place certain limitations on freedom.

It is impossible for man to follow the path of deviation from nature for any considerable period of time.

8 December 1990

Refraining from mockery

When the Prophet reached Tabuk, and found the Ka'ab ibn Malik was not among the Muslim force, he said: "What has become of Ka'ab?" A member of the Banu Salma tribe said that Ka'ab was too busy admiring his shawls and his shoulders. Mu'az ibn Jabal said in response, "That is a very nasty thing to say," and then addressing the Prophet he said: "Truly, we know nothing but good of Ka'ab."

III-founded Pride

Those who adopt the religion of the Qur'an after having come to believe in the Qur'an are given the name of Muslims. As the Qur'an says, "It is He who has named you Muslims." (22:78). This appears to be a simple matter – the naming of a religious adherent by the holy book in which he believes – but this does not apply to the followers of other religions.

Those who believe in the religion of Moses are known as Jews. But, in their book, the Torah, it is nowhere mentioned that Moses had given the name of Jews to his followers. Similarly, the followers of Christ are called Christians, but nowhere does the New Testament tell us that Christ had given his name to his followers.

The same is true of Hinduism, the followers of which are known as Hindus. Nowhere in their holy books is it written that those who believe in this religion will be called Hindus.

In its issue of August 20, 1990, the *Times of India* brought out an article by Indira Rothermund, entitled: 'Fundamentalism has no Legitimacy in Hindu Dharma'. This article states:

"An eminent historian has pointed out that the word Hindu is not found in many ancient Indian texts but was coined by the invading Arabs in the 8th century AD and was a geographical term applied to people who lived on or beyond the banks of the river Sindhu or Indus."

Not only the name of Islam, but everything which is considered a part of religion is plainly recorded for all times in the Qur'an and Hadith, whereas other religions have seen changes on a vast scale. As such their sets of beliefs have no solid, historical basis.

Unlike all the other religions, Islam has preserved its pristine purity. It has a long record of complete historical credibility something of which no other religion can boast. Islam, in the best sense of the word, is a scientific religion, while all other religions amount to little more than sets of unfounded beliefs. They cannot, therefore, be accorded the status of scientific religions in the modern, academic context. While Islam is the religion of today, other religions are mere faded relics of antiquity.

This does not mean, however, that other religions were not initially true. So far as their original form is concerned, they were true religions, but, as time went on, they failed to retain their purity, thereby forfeiting any right to be given any credence from the academic and scientific points of view.

Islam was invested with this distinctive quality by God, so that its followers would find it easy to communicate it to the rest of the world. When, out of a long list of religions, only one religion is authentic and all the rest are spurious, the choice for the seekers in the matter of religion becomes easy. It no longer entails a long and arduous quest, for there is but one truth in this field which they can safely adopt without questioning.

The Muslims of today have done nothing to present this unique truth to the world. Yet they have begun to take a pride in the fact of their being the sole possessors of this truth. They have thus failed to put this distinguishing feature of Islam to good use in spreading its truth far and wide. Instead they have made it into an object of pride.

If Muslims engaged themselves in the communication of the Islamic message, they would be amply rewarded for it by God. Instead, they inscribe on the walls of the cities, "We take pride in Islam." thus seeking to take credit for an act they have yet to perform – a sin no doubt in the eyes of God.

Meeting out justice equally

Ali lost a coat of armour in the Battle of Jamal. One day he was walking in the market. He saw that a Christian was selling a coat of armour, and recognized it as his own. "That coat of armour is mine," Ali said. "A Muslim Qazi will judge between us." Ali was Commander of the Faithful at that time and Qazi Shuraih was Chief Justice. The case was brought before the Qazi. Ali asked him to judge between himself and the Christian. "What is your claim?" the Qazi asked him. "That this coat of armour is mine," Ali replied. "What do you have to say," the Qazi addressed the Christian. "The Commander of the Faithful is mistaken; it belongs to me," the Christian replied. The Qazi then asked Ali who his witnesses were, and Ali brought forward his son Hasan and slave Qanbar. The Qazi told him to bring another witness instead of Hasan. "Do you reject the evidence of Hasan?" Ali said to him. "That's not the point," the Qazi said, "but I have heard you yourself say that the evidence of a son in support of his father is not acceptable."

Conditions for Success

Today, there is no one who will dispute Japan's new-found status as a world economic superpower. Traditionally, it had always been military might which had put a nation into the forefront. But Japan, having suffered a severe decline in its fortunes as a result of the loss of such military might, decided to forge ahead on the economic front, on the assumption that there was no limit to economic strength. In so doing, it has proved that a nation can become a superpower solely by dint of the efforts it makes towards economic progress.

What enabled Japan to turn itself into a superpower? It certainly did not do so by creating a furore over its demands, or by relying on slogan-based politics. It was rather quiet, dogged perseverance which made it into a superpower. First of all, it frankly recognised its greatly reduced stature, and it very determinedly set about achieving the status which it has today. Mr. Subhash Chakravarti, a resident journalist in Tokyo, makes the following analysis:

Japan having long recognised the U.S. as the most important external factor in Asia is seeking to share power and influence with it without compromising Japan's own self-interests or ambitions. (*The Time of India*, April 27, 1990).

This is the most important principle of progress in the modern world. Here, you have to be small in order to be great. You have to submit to subjugation in order to achieve domination. Here, going forward is only for those who can first endure the trial of being left behind.

In this world, losing can open the door to finding, provided we see effort as the key.

11 December 1990

Surrendering to God, and wishing others well

Jarir came to embrace Islam. The Prophet asked him to extend his hand for the oath of allegiance. "Allegiance on what?" Jarir asked. "That you will surrender to God, and wish every Muslim well." He then swore allegiance to the prophet. He was a very clever man. When swearing allegiance, he said to the Prophet that he would do what he could. Afterwards, this clause was included in everybody's oath.

Whither India India's Journey – Backwards or Forwards

The 30th of October, 1990 was marred by happenings which were perhaps the first of their kind in the history of India. That was the day that the city of Ayodhya – a name given by Hindu saints to signify peace and non-violence – saw a vast, unlawful gathering of extremist Hindus indulging in the most violent demonstrations. Breaking down the cemented boundary wall of the Babri Masjid and damaging one of its domes, they climbed up and fixed their flags on all the three domes of the mosque.

This frenzied violence erupted in Ayodhya while the Babri Masjid-Ram Janam Bhumi controversy was still sub judice. Not only the government, but all justice-loving people of the country made repeated appeals to the Hindu extremists to do the court the honour of waiting for its judgement and, in the meantime, to refrain from taking any action. But, ignoring all such appeals, they left their homes, entered Ayodhya by force and let loose a reign of terror.

The concept of tolerance, which has been India's great mark of distinction for thousands of years and, as much, a source of national pride till today has been sullied and laid bow by the events of the terrible day. The authorities certainly had taken what they considered adequate preventive measures, the cost to the Central and U. P. governments being of the order of 40 crores of rupees. But nothing they could do could save this age-old tradition of tolerance. All barriers of law enforcement and administration were simply swept away by the great flood of emotionalism which has been typical of the entire proceedings, thus enabling the *kar sewaks* to carry their plans for destruction into effect.

The *Times of India* of October 31 rightly pointed out that a vast majority of Hindus would never condone such action and must, as a result, be suffering from acute embarrassment if not downright shame.

The very conscience of India has cried out against this agonizing event. People rightly feel that this violent attack did as much damage to the sacred traditions of the Hindu religion as it did to the Babri Masjid. In consequence, a large number of the people of this country have publicly expressed the deep pain they have felt at this outrageous act and have unequivocally voiced their condemnation of it in speeches and articles.

The *Times of India* of October 31 carries a front-page editorial entitled 'Anguished India' which says:

'The BJP and the VHP clearly failed to realize that whipping up of atavistic passions for political gain would give them at best a 'pyrrhic victory.'

The Hindustan Times of November 1, 1990, has trenchantly expressed the same profound concern in a front-page cartoon. The back ground is a playing field on one side of which stands V.P. Singh, the former Prime Minister. On the other side is a enthusiastic Mr. Advani, the President of the BJP. Both are raising their hands and giving the victory sign. In front of them on the ground, lies a weak, debilitated human wreck. Upon this vanquished body is written 'India.'

This cartoon is an apt illustration of the outcome of the political policy followed by the present Indian leaders whose sole aim would appear to be to build themselves up politically, even if it be at the cost of the nation's downfall. Why else should they be so keen to kindle the fires of hatred, bias and violence? The events of October 1990 testify to these leaders having fulfilled their ambitions. Their short-sighted policies may have led the country to the brink of destruction, but they are nevertheless ready to celebrate their political victory.

In the destructive game of politics recently played out in the country in the name of religion, the leaders have won and the country has lost. The leaders have received more than their fair share in terms of their actual abilities. But whatever the country had before, it has lost even that.

What do the extremist Hindus have to say to this? They hark back to the Mughal period and say that since they were unjustly treated in those days they must now avenge themselves. Leaving aside the rights or wrongs of these allegations, we have to consider what exactly the Mughal rulers gained from their oppressive tactics. The 'gain' was only that their government weakened and finally saw its dissolution in 1857.

In like manner, the extremist Hindu leaders allege that the British were cruel oppressors. Whether true or false, this too begs the question of what they gained from their 'cruelty.' The only 'gain' they made was that their power was systematically uprooted from the country, their rule coming to an end in 1947.

In much the same way, extremist Hindu leaders accuse the post-independence Congress government of having treated Hindus unjustly throughout its entire rule. Leaving this allegation aside for the moment, we must again address ourselves to the question of What was actually gained from the execution of such a policy. The only 'gain' was that the party's roots were progressively undermined to the point where it lost the elections in 1988.

Now the extremist Hindu leaders are adopting the policy of their predecessors: they are following the same path of cruelty. What exactly is it that they want for themselves? Do they want to ascend the same throne of destruction as had to be vacated by the Mughals, the British and the Congress Party? Having adopted the same course of action as their forerunners, have they forgotten that the law of nature is one and the same for everybody – that it does not discriminate between one group and another? Will the cruelty which caused past rulers to be consigned to oblivion bring any different a fate to the new rulers?

It is still possible that the extremist Hindu leaders might, through negative action, achieve political gain, that is, they could conceivably, in the eyes of a particular set of voters, assume the stature of national heroes; they might win at least the next election and might succeed in occupying the seat of power. But

the greater possibility is that the law of nature will turn full circle against them on account of their destructive activities. They will then find themselves written off a just one more group of oppressors, and be removed from the seat of power.

The present world is a world of trial in which everyone must prove his mettle. It is also a world in which the corrupt and the oppressors must expect ultimately to be removed by historical forces and to be superseded by men of greater moral stature. This law of nature which regulates human leadership has endured throughout the annal of human history, and India is assuredly no exception to this law.

Battle of Prestige

Prior to 1947, India was ruled by the British. Not only was it considered by the people economically ruinous and socially unjust for the country to be ruled by a foreign power, but it was also thought to be extremely damaging to the Indian psyche. This being so, the movement for independence was launched against this domination. After enormous sacrifices, the country was finally set free on August 15, 1947.

Now it would have been proper and logical for all of the people of the subcontinent to work unitedly towards the progress of the country. But this did not happen. One reason was that independence also entailed the partition of the country. The people divided up into two big communities, one of which demanded partition, the other demanding 'United India.' The result of this antagonism in politics was that even after the exit of the British, the problems of the country were still very far from being solved; It became a question of 'Hindu prestige' versus 'Muslim prestige'.

This undercurrent has persisted unabated since 1947 re-surfacing periodically to turn almost every national controversy into a prestige issue between the two communities. For instance, when a Hindu procession passes by a Muslim *mohalla*, the Muslims living there think in terms of their prestige being tarnished. So they demand a change of route for the procession. Now it becomes a matter of Hindu prestige. The Hindu thinks if the route of the procession is changed, his national prestige will be at stake. Both sides insist on their demands. Both sides suffer from the negative mentality which is termed in the Qur'an the 'Bigotry of *Jahiliya*' (pre-Islamic days of ignorance) (48:26).

The course of events has been no different in the case of the Babri Masjid-Ram Janam Bhumi controversy. When this controversy escalated after 1986, the Muslims maintained that for them this was not a matter of just one mosque: it was a matter of life and death for the whole community. They were not, therefore, going to remain silent, come what may. The Hindus, for their part, said that it was not a matter of just one temple, but assumed the proportions of a 'second defeat.' By accepting Partition in 1947, they had met their first defeat. Now, being the rulers, they were not going to suffer a second defeat. A simple matter was thereby transformed into a prestige issue for both the communities, and once an issue takes on this hue, its complexity increases one thousand fold.

This battle of prestige has been going on for the last fifty years, bringing the country's progress to a state of impasse. Only when this battle comes to an end will the country's journey towards progress be again set in motion.

It is a matter of historical record that such problems never end on a bilateral basis. The complexity of the problem calls for unilateral action. But which side is to take this unilateral step?

Judging from recent events, the Hindus will not be willing to do so. The Hindu psychology is such that they are still smarting from the 'first defeat'. And, considering that in the affairs of the nation, it is they who have the upper hand, it seems unlikely that they would opt for any unilateral solution which would bring on a 'second defeat.'

When a problem cannot be solved bilaterally, there is only one practical way to solve the problem – unilaterally. Given the present situation, I would earnestly urge my Muslim brethren to ready themselves for such a sacrifice. For the sake of the country's progress, and, as a result their own progress, they should take it upon themselves, once and for all, to set aside prestige as a matter of overriding importance. In the words of the Qur'an, they should follow 'the word of piety' rather than 'the word of bigotry.' (48:26). This is the only possible solution to the problem, given the present state of affairs.

Whenever any controversy arises between Hindus and Muslims, the latter must either ignore it, or attempt to seek a solution within the limitation of the sphere in which it first arose. That is, they should not make a national issue of it, thus involving the whole community, where again it will become a matter of prestige. This policy will no doubt mean the making of sacrifices solely on the part of the Muslims. But the day the Muslims reshape their psychology so as to be ready for such a sacrifice, the country will start out afresh on its journey towards progress. And once the journey is under way, the country will inevitably reach its destination.

The Principles of Change

*After the conquest of Mecca,
most things were left as they were,
until gradually, naturally,
everything took on the colour of Islam.*

The pre-Islamic era in Arabia is known as the *Jahiliya* period. (The period of ignorance). During this time, the Meccans had once quarreled so bitterly amongst themselves that they had started preparing for war. This quarrel was about who should hold the traditional offices of *hijabah*, *siqayah*, *rifadah*, *nadwah*, *liwa'* and *qiyadah*.*

Finally, certain serious-minded people intervened and an agreement was reached that the offices of *Al-Hijabah* and *Al-liwa'* should remain with the Banu Abd-Ad-Dar (the Dar tribe) and those of *As-Siqaya* and *Al-Rifada* should be given to the Banu Abd-Munaf (the Munaf tribe). Ibn Ishaq, the historian and first biographer of the Prophet, writes:

People adhered to this settlement until finally God sent Islam among them. Then the Prophet of Islam said that Islam has done nothing more but fortify further whatever settlements existed in the period of *Jahiliya*. (*Seerat ibn Hisham*, vol.1,p.144).

This underlines a very important principle of Islamic policy. Prior to the advent of Islam, the Meccans were idolaters, and any decisions arrived at by them were made as by idolaters. Moreover, these were the very people who had opposed Islam with all their might. Even so, the Prophet did not hasten to alter their decisions. He rather announced the reinforcement of such decisions or settlements.

Attempting to change all decisions taken by a rival group, after securing a hold on one's opponents, is extremely unwise. It is just like adding insult to injury, and only adds to one's problems. Corruption will inevitably reappear in society and, even in the name of carrying out reforms, evil can result. It is better to be circumspect and to keep the previous structure intact, in spite of having full authority to change it. And whatever the necessary changes, they should be effected gradually and in a natural way, as was done by the Prophet.

After the conquest of Mecca, most things were left as they were, until gradually, naturally, everything took on the colour of Islam.

* *Siqayah*: provider of water for Meccan pilgrims;

Hijabah: gate-keeper;

Liwa', 'wartime standard-bearer';

Nadwah: caterer to the needs of pilgrims (e.g. travel arrangements, board and lodging, etc.).

Qiyadah: leadership of the army at war.

18 December 1990

Greed for the world destroys a person

The Prophet sent Abu Ubaida Ibn Jarrah to Bahrain to collect taxes. When he returned, the Ansar heard that he had brought money back, and joined the Prophet in the morning prayer. When he had finished praying, they came forward. The Prophet smiled on seeing them. "I think you have heard that Abu Ubaida has brought something back from Bahrain," he said to them. They said that they had. "You can rejoice and expect that which is pleasing to you," he said. "By God, I do not fear your impoverishment. What I do fear is that you should be given abundance in the world, like those before you. I fear that you should become greedy for the world, as they did, and that you should perish, as they perished."

18 December 1990

Ignoring vain talk

After the conquest of Mecca, Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan came to swear allegiance to the Prophet. Part of the oath that the Prophet used to administer was a clause prohibiting the murder of infants. When Hind came to this part of the oath, she said to the Prophet "You have killed them on the day of Badr." According to another account she said: "Have you left us any children to slay?" The Prophet made no response to this taunt and simply accepted her allegiance.

Islam: The Liberator of the Mind

In ancient times, an intellectual climate dominated by polytheism tended to encourage the spread of superstition throughout the world. Such an atmosphere was necessarily unfavorable to the emergence of scientific ideas. That is why there was no country during that period in which learning and science could progress. It was only when the Islamic revolution put an end to this age-old harnessing of the intellect to polytheism that attitudes began, effectively, to change.

Ancient Greece

The greatest influence on the ancient Greek mind was that of mythology. (Greek mythology) is such a vast subject that whole volumes have been devoted to it, and there is even an "Encyclopaedia of Greek Mythology.") This mythology is composed of innumerable legends concerning gods, goddesses and superhuman heroes of whom the Greeks remained in great awe. They thought of them as historical realities although surrounding their origins and deeds with an awe of mysticism. In such an atmosphere it was simply impossible for any genuine science to make progress. While the Greek myths exercised a strong influence over poets and artists, who flourished in great numbers, they did little to help those who were engaged in scientific enquiry. Scientists, in the modern sense of the word, could not thrive in such an ambience.

In ancient Greece, every object had a god or goddess associated with it and mystical concepts abounded. That is why the atmosphere favoured the progress only of the arts and literature.

Greek mythology formed the staple of most Greek poetry and drama. It also influenced the thoughts of philosophers and historians to a marked degree.

"Through the medium of Latin, Greek myth influenced medieval poets ... nearly all the major English poets from Shakespeare to Robert Bridges turned for inspiration to Greek mythology." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 8, pp. 405-406).

The civilization of the Greeks was the most illustrious of ancient times. But it did nothing to set in motion the processes of scientific thinking, which came much later to Europe. If scientific thought reached Europe, it was entirely due to the stimulus given to it by the Muslims, for up to that point, the concept of polytheism had acted as a deterrent to progress. The concept of monotheism, on the contrary, ushered in a whole new era of intellectual liberty.

Roman Civilization

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* writes:

Towards the close of the pre-Christian period, the Roman Empire achieved dominance over the entire Mediterranean world. Rome presents a paradox to historians of science. This civilization, so sophisticated and apparently modern in its politics and personalities, very strong in the learned disciplines of the law, very progressive in the state technologies of warfare and public hygiene, with direct access to the corpus of Greek science, nevertheless failed to produce a single scientist (16/367).

The article goes on to say that historians, attempting to explain the Romans' utter failure in science, suggest that "perhaps the social structure of Rome, combined with its long adherence to gross forms of magic, left no place for an appreciation of that peculiar commitment to the hard and hazardous road to knowledge and wisdom that lies through disciplined enquiry into isolated aspects of the natural world. Indeed, when one considers how few have been the cultures in which science has flourished, one may reverse the question and consider Rome as the normal, and classical Greece as the surprising phenomenon to be explained" (16/367).

The historians have failed to produce any convincing answer to this question. But the answer becomes obvious when we take into account the fact that the Romans were polytheists. It was actually polytheism and idol worship which had stood in the way of their carrying out research and investigation in the field of science. The concept of the sanctity of all natural objects had prevented them from making an intellectual conquest of them.

The Dawn of the Scientific Age

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states under the heading of "History of Science" that "the present way of comprehending the natural world is a very recent development. It was possible for great civilizations of the past to achieve highly developed technologies and religious and legal systems in the complete absence of a conception of science as it is now understood. Such were the civilizations of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and the western Hemisphere. Even the Hebrews, people whose religion forms a large part of the basis of European civilization, were indifferent to science. Although some two and a half millennia ago the Greeks created a system of thought that was similar to the scientific, in succeeding centuries there was little progress beyond their achievement and little comprehension of it. The great power of science and its pervasive influence on all aspects of life are thus very recent developments.

The dawn of European science has traditionally been located among the philosophers of the Greek city states on the coast and islands of the eastern Mediterranean, in the later 6th and 5th centuries BC. Their work is known only through fragments, references, and brief quotations made by authors who came later, perhaps by hundreds of years (16/366).

These brief references are actually very misleading. For example, the saying of the earliest known philosopher, Thales, "All is water," would appear to be a scientific sentence. But when taken as a whole – "All is water, and world is full of gods" (16/366) it assumes a superstitious character. (Thales was a philosopher who lived in the 6th century B.C. one of the writings or contemporary source materials survive. His name is included in the canon of the legendary seven wise men).

The truth is that for both Greeks and Romans, there was only one barrier obstructing the path of science, and that was their polytheistic thinking. This indeed was what had robbed them of the realistic bent of mind which is so essential to scientific investigation. There was therefore no question of their ever making any progress in this field.

Journey Towards Progress

Many great scientific minds were born in ancient times in the European country of Greece, one of them being Archimedes, who made great strides in hydrostatics, even inventing a simple machine – the water screw. But it is strange that these Greek scientific minds shone only temporarily, like meteors, and then disappeared. They failed to usher Europe, or even Greece itself, into the age of science and industry. Archimedes himself was struck down, while pondering over geometrical problems in the sand, by the sword of a Roman soldier.

A very long intellectual gap is found between the learning of the ancient Greeks and that of modern scientific Europe. While Archimedes had invented the water screw as early as 260 B.C., the first machine press was not invented until 1450, by Germany's J. Gutenberg. The interval between the two is more than one thousand five hundred years.

What was the reason for this gap? Why did ancient Greek science find no continuation either in Greece or elsewhere in Europe? The answer is that before the Islamic revolution, the atmosphere was totally opposed to the work of scientific research being freely carried out. It was not until the revolution brought about by Islam, on the basis of monotheism, that all obstacles could be removed from the path of scientific progress. This was the first time in history that there had been such a liberation of the intellect.

Scientific progress, to be effective, must be a continuous process. The work of the Greek scholars, however, due to the unpropitious circumstances of the times, could not advance in this way. It shone forth momentarily, then disappeared from the scene. Then in the seventh century Hijrah, when the Islamic revolution had put an end to the age of superstition, many favourable opportunities presented themselves to scientific progress. Now scientific research was carried on in an unbroken line right up to modern times.

Due to the earlier unfavourable atmosphere, the Greek scholars confined their work largely to the field of theory. They did not carry out practical experiments. For instance, Aristotle wrote treatises on

physics, but, throughout his entire life, he did not carry out a single experiment. While the Greek scholars contributed greatly to the field of logic, they made no worthwhile contribution in the field of empirical science. The real beginning of science was made when the spirit of free enquiry was created in man. In ancient times, this spirit manifested itself sporadically on the part of individuals, but due to the hostile environment, this could not develop on a large scale.

An environment truly conducive to free enquiry emerged only after the monotheistic revolution of Islam. The Islamic revolution instantly changed the whole atmosphere, paving the way for the work of investigation to go on unhampered. This scientific way of thinking had its beginnings in Mecca. Then it spread to Medina and Damascus, from where it went on to make Baghdad a great centre of innovative thought. From Baghdad, it found its way to Spain, Sicily and Italy, finally spreading all over Europe. It went on spreading, ultimately changing the universal mind.

This evolutionary journey of learning had not been possible before the Islamic revolution. Prior to this, scientific thinking had taken place only at the individual level, or in isolated places and, due to the adversarial atmosphere, it failed to flourish. Islam, for the first time, gave to the world an atmosphere which actively fostered scientific progress.

23 December 1990

To help another out is a great act of worship

Abdullah ibn Abbas was sitting in retreat (Itikaf) in the Prophet's mosque in Medina, when a person came and sat next to him. Detecting signs of distress on the man's face, Ibn Abbas asked him what was the matter. "I owe a person some money," the man replied, "and by the lord of this grave, I am not able to repay it." "Should I speak to the claimant on your behalf?" Ibn Abbas left the mosque at once, the man reminded him that he was in retreat. "Perhaps you have forgotten," he said. "I have not forgotten," Ibn Abbas told him, "but – and it seems like only yesterday – I have heard from the lord of this grave," – tears came into the eyes of the Prophet's companion and cousin as he spoke – "that to do one's best to help one's brother is better than spending ten years in retreat."

(Baihaqi)